

Using Non-Self to Let Go

Ajahn Brahmavamso

Edited from a recorded talk given by Ajahn Brahmavamso during a 9-day meditation retreat in 1997, Perth, Western Australia.

So this evening's talk will be a Dhamma talk rather than a question time because I missed giving the Dhamma talk this morning and one of the monks reminded me at tea time that this retreat has gone to Thursday now. So there's only actually a couple more dhamma talks left. So he said it's about time I got into the "oomphy" Dhamma talks and the "oomphy" Dhamma talk this evening is talking about anatta. I'm going to bring this one up right now because it's going to bring together a few threads about what I've been talking about so far. If the talk goes according to the direction I want it to go, I'm also going to bring in how we use the perspective of anatta, how to develop the deeper stages of meditation, and wherever you are in your meditation how this perspective, looking at things through the prism of anatta can help develop the meditation into more profound and deeper levels.

I did say in an earlier talk that it's through wisdom power that you get very deep in meditation not through mere willpower and a little bit of insight, a little bit of understanding. Seeing this process from a different perspective has enormous power to quieten the mind down, and so I wanted to especially emphasise this in the latter part of this talk how anatta can be used in this process of meditation. But first of all, just the meaning of anatta should be apprehended by us and it's one of those subjects, or the subject in Buddhism, which to many people is very hard to understand and to get your mind around, and that by itself is a good point for insight to arise. Why in many parts of Buddhism when we come to the teaching of anatta there's something inside us which rebels? That is the illusion of self getting uncomfortable. This is stirring up something which is very deeply rooted inside us and something which does not want to even contemplate anatta, non-self, and that is a symptom of the whole problem. The Buddha was very uncompromising when he taught anatta and it's one of the reasons why people find it a bit difficult because there's no way around. When you read the Buddha's teachings, there's no way around coming to the conclusion that there is no-one in here. There is no controller. There is no knower. There is no doer. There is no self, no soul, no being. And this uncompromising conclusion which you get from looking at the teachings causes you to actually investigate because so much other teachings of the Buddha seem to be so powerful, so deep, so true, so effective, and this one, seems to be the hard one. It is the hard one because on the realisation of anatta, of uncovering the illusion of self that, the whole path towards enlightenment revolves. This is the insight, the discovery, the understanding which changes one from just being a person who wanders around the samsara, lifetime after lifetime, to one who is on the way out of the samsara, inevitably, certainly, surely bound for Nibbana. It's the crux, the fulcrum, of the whole practice. Why is it difficult to see? It's difficult to see because we don't want to see it, but at least we can get a handle on what the Buddha was talking about, because first of all that he asked you to not look at anatta from a philosophical point of view - which is one of the big mistakes as we intellectualise it - but to start looking at anatta from the practical point of view: how it affects our views, perceptions, thoughts, in particular, to look at what do we take to be a self, a soul, a me. And this is where we really get to grip with this teaching of anatta: how we use it. Instead of thinking "is there a self?" or "who am I?", you say "what do I perceive my self to be? What do I perceive is mine? What do I think is me? What do I think is mine? What do I know? What do I view as me? What do I view as mine?". And here the Buddha started taking apart this illusion bit by bit.

First of all, you've got to identify what this illusion is. The illusion is all your perceptions which assume a self, all your thoughts which conclude there's a self, and all your views which think there's somebody there. What is all of this? This is what we call like the mirage. The simile of a mirage is powerful because you know with a mirage there is some aspect which is real there. A mirage is not pure imagination. In a mirage there is a real light arriving in your eyes. There is an image on the back of your eyes. The point is that the brain or the mind misinterprets what you're seeing and gives it an interpretation, gives it a label which it does not deserve. The mirage thinks there's a body of water there or rather the mind interprets the mirage to be a body of water on the road. But we all know it's just the light being reflected from the sky. This is a mirage of the self. Now in order to find out it's a mirage we've got to actually know what this is that we're misinterpreting, to know this experience we are taking to be a self. It's incredible sometimes that even the ordinary aspects of life which we should really know better are not ours, they're nothing to do with us, we take to be a self. Our body we take to be a self when we're concerned about it. A self has property. A self owns things. Any person in this world has their property, their possessions, their area of control because what you own you have rights over. People think that they have human rights over their body because they think it is their body. People think they have rights over their mind because they think it is their mind. They think they have rights over their thoughts. I can think what I like. Can you?

These are things we possess. First of all, our body. Do you possess your body? Do you own it? Is it yours? The older you become the more you realise just how out of control this body is. If there is an owner to this body, it's nature, not you. It gets sick. It hurts. It gets old. It gets better again. And you have just a little influence over this, but not that much. However you can understand that whenever you assume this body to be you or yours, you suffer because as soon as you think that this body which a mosquito is biting belongs to you, you suffer. If you could just imagine this mosquito was biting not your body but say, this microphone in front of me, would you worry about it? Would you be concerned about it? You would not, because this

microphone isn't yours. If you could actually perceive, even like through your imagination, that this arm or this leg which the mosquito was biting wasn't yours, suffering will disappear straight away. The concern would be gone. There would be a sense of peace. Whenever you regard something as not yours, the result is this thing we call "letting go". What is the opposite of letting go? It is called owning. I won't call it controlling. I'll call it owning now because the owning always assumes an owner, and so we look at what we own and what we possess or rather what we think we possess, and this is the way of accessing the teaching of anatta using the Buddha's teaching which I mentioned earlier. That if there's a self, a soul, a me, there'll be things which belong to me. If there's things which belong to me, if there's possession, there has to be an owner. These two go together.

So you look for the teaching of anatta, just what you think you own. What do you own in this world? Do you own your body? If you do, you suffer. If you think you own your body you'll be attached to it. If you think you own the body you will not be able to let it go. I've seen many people in that predicament, close to death in pain but not willing to let the body go. Sometimes it's very sad to see a person thrashing about in the last few moments of their life, struggling for the breath, struggling for a comfortable position, struggling to stop death happening. Even though they're in pain, they'd rather have that pain and discomfort than have death. Why is that? It's attachment to the body. Why are they attached to their body? It's because they think it's theirs. They can't let it go. It's like a child with a little teddy bear or a doll. Someone's trying to take it from you. "No, leave it, it's mine. You can't have it". You won't let that teddy bear or little doll go. You can see that in a child, and you know that the child's being stupid. However, this little doll, this little teddy bear is also the body we carry around with us. When nature takes it back, do you scream? Do you cry "No, no, no. I'm too young to die. I've got too many things to do. Not yet, tomorrow maybe, but not today, not now"?

This is what we're talking about with attachment and the cause of this is this mirage of self and soul. This mirage of ownership. You can actually see this happening in certain moments of your life, when the body is threatened by sickness, by disease, or even just simple pain, when there's a pain in the legs when you're meditating, What is the problem? What is the real problem? Is it the pain or is it because you think it's my pain? Why can't you let go of the pain? Why can't you just go to the breath and just stay with the breath?

If you look closely you'll know you'll go to that which concerns you, which you think is your business, which you think is what you're supposed to be doing. You go to that which is your assumed responsibility, that which you own or think you own. You go to the pain in your legs because you think it's your legs. It's your pain. You have to do something about it. If you could realise at that point, or do a little imagining, not self: "This is not mine. Nothing to do with me. This is not my concern. Let the body look after the pain. I can look after the breath or look after the nimitta or look after the mind." You could do it then. When you understand you don't own these things, only then can you let them go. Attachment is born by the illusion of ownership.

You try that the next time you have an irritation, a distraction, just to let go of the body, understanding you don't own this, it only belongs to nature. You'll find the disturbance of the pain will vanish and you'll be free to go back to the breath or the nimitta or into deep samadhi. You won't be concerned with the body because you're not regarding it as yours. This particular way of looking at the body becomes extremely important the deeper you go in meditation, because there comes a time and this is the time when the nimitta arises, when you are about to leave the body completely and with it you're leaving the five external senses. So many meditators experience fear at this point, because it's one of the upakkilesas, one of the great hindrances to attaining the jhanas. You can get to the nimitta but you can't go in. You can't absorb into it. There's something holding you back, some fear, some inability to let go and it's good to understand what you can't let go of and why.

This is where the insight starts to uncover deep-seated attachments, deep-seated illusions which cause attachments. If you get to that point many times and investigate it, you will find that what you're afraid of letting go is this body and these instruments of the five senses which give us a sense of protection and security about the longevity and protection of the body. It's as if sight disappears, sound disappears, hearing disappears, smell, taste and especially physical feelings disappear, we're not quite sure what will happen to this body, as if all of the guards to the safety of this body go to sleep, as if we've got no guards on our house, no alarms, no protection, we're afraid that somebody might go in and steal something or destroy our whole house. We can't let go because we're worried about the safety of that which we left behind. We're worried about letting go of the body.

The only way you can pass that hurdle or the usual way you can get past that hurdle is another way of just being so fascinated by the nimitta you don't really realise what you're letting go of. But the very good way of passing that hurdle is to realise at that point that what you're letting go of is nothing to do with you. The body is not yours. The senses are not yours. You don't own, you're not part of them. These are just something what you just take up and use, which you can put back down again. You feel free to abandon the body only when you realise on a very deep level, it's not yours. So at that stage of the meditation a little bit of anatta, a little bit of non-self, does wonders for freeing you to go into deep jhanas. You look at that body and you can let it go. It's quite safe. It's not yours anyway. It doesn't matter if it does die in jhana and let go of all these senses. You realise they're nothing to do with you. Not your business. Leave it alone. Let it go and this control which comes up. The control which is always trying to control, especially the body. Let that go. Give it away. It's not yours. Nothing to do with you. And the control which is trying to control your mind, trying to force it into jhana, trying to nudge it into jhanas, trying to mold it this way and that way so that jhanas will happen. Nothing to do with you. Let it go.

One of the great monks in Thailand who's been to visit here a few times says that when he meditates he just does nothing. He just goes into deep jhanas. He's a really great meditator and that's the way he meditates. Just give up. Give up the doer, and the only way he can do that is because it just doesn't belong to him. Why am I doing something which doesn't belong to me? Like mowing someone else's garden on a Saturday afternoon. What are you doing that for? Let them mow their own garden.

So this is anatta which actually starts to propel you into the jhanas and the Buddha actually said again and again when he started talking about not just looking at the body as non-self but look at some of the senses. He said very clearly, it's in the Anattalakkhana Sutta, the second teaching which he gave. So what you see isn't yours. Seeing isn't yours. Sight consciousness isn't yours and it's not you. He said like hearing what you hear. Just hearing consciousness is not you. Smelling, tasting, touching, the feelings in your body, they're not you. The feeling organ, the body, is not yours. Feeling consciousness is not yours. Mind objects aren't yours. The mind consciousness isn't yours. The mind isn't yours. He actually said that very carefully, in order for people to understand that these senses are part of nature. Because of the nature of illusion is like the function of a mirage, we mistake these things to be something that they're not, especially the five external senses. We are attached to these which is why we can't let them go. We take them to be ours, my sight, my hearing, my smell, my taste, my physical touch, because we take them to be ours, because we think we own them, we are concerned with them.

Why is it that during meditation we get disturbed by sounds outside? Have you ever investigated that? The traffic outside, the sound of someone banging or the lawnmower going or helicopter going overhead. Why do they disturb us? What's the point of listening to these sounds? What do we get out of it? Why do we do it? The reason why we do it is because we think that sound is ours and we're scared of letting it go. It's as if we don't attend to sound it will disappear once and for all, forever. We're so used to this. We've grown up with it. It's like a good friend. Once they go we think we've lost something. How many years when one person dies and gets cremated the other person always thinks there's something missing there somewhere? They don't feel comfortable. Isn't it the same that we're so used to these five senses that when one disappears, I mean really disappears, it's not quite right. We turn it on again deliberately. We want to hear anything rather than have silence or rather than have no sound at all. Even with the body. We've grown up with these feelings in the body. We're used to them and when all these feelings disappear it can feel so weird sometimes. We're not quite used to this, as if there's something missing somewhere. We get afraid. Our comfort blankets are taken away and we just snatched them back again.

With these five senses, if you realise these are nothing to do with you, sound becomes just like a telephone ringing but it's somebody else's call. Not yours. Nothing to do with you. When the body starts to itch, there's a message with someone else's name on it. Not yours. So you don't open the envelope. You just don't communicate with that which doesn't belong to you, which is not your concern. If you could do that, understanding the Buddha's teaching as anatta with the five external senses, it's easy to let them go, to turn them off., not to pick them up. If you can do that, jhana becomes so easy. The burden with jhana is the mosquitoes biting you, the sound disturbing you, the pain in the knees and all the thinking about that. That's what disturbs you. If you can let go of the body, abandon the body, jhana becomes easy.

Remember somebody brought this question up in question time a few days ago about that Christian monk who was torturing his body by whipping himself until the five senses got so unpleasant that he turned them all off and gave them away. That's one way of abandoning the five senses. Make them just so unpleasant that you just can't stand them any longer. Then you chuck them away. But that's the hard way. The easy way is to realise that these things aren't yours, don't belong to you. When you can do that, the meditation just becomes so easy. You can let go of these things because you realise they aren't yours. So this is the way we can actually use the understanding of non-self to look at the five external senses and to let them go.

When we go into the world of the mind and that is much harder to let go because we have more attachment to the world of the mind than even to the world of the body and its five external senses. In particular we have this thing which we call "thought". Why is thought so hard to give up? Again because we think it's me thinking. It's my thoughts. If you could actually look upon thoughts as being irrelevant chatter, if you could imagine all this thought is like coming from this little demon inside of you who's managed to creep in through your ear-hole when you were asleep and it's getting into a stupid conversation with another demon who's gone in your other ear-hole at night and they're having this conversation with each other and it's completely stupid, you would then realise that it's not yours. It's just two little devils inside your head speaking with one another. Even that imagination should be enough to realise this is not your thoughts. It's not your conversation, just don't listen to it. You don't give it importance. You realise it's not your responsibility. You don't need to listen to that commentary. You can let it go only when you realise it's not yours. That inner commentary is what we call the doer because if you listen to that commentary just so often - it's giving advice, giving criticism, very rarely give praise but sometimes it does that as well - you would see that it always gives orders. This is what we're talking about, the doer. This is how the doer manifests. This is the order, the speech. This is how the doer governs you. You think something and then you follow those thoughts. An order is given and you do that. This doer, this is what we call "will", "choice". You can actually see it happening. Not "will" and "choice" as an idea but "will" and "choice" as an experience which you can view happening in your mind. You can actually see the mind moving into thought and from that thought an action following very often. This is how there's a governing of your actions of body and speech and mind. This is how volition appears to you. You can actually see it happening and that's what I was saying is conditioned. That's what I was saying you can see the causes for two little demons who've crawled in your ears. Not you, nothing to do with you. Not coming from a me. In particular, nothing belonging to me. This is not your orders. These are words, thoughts, ideas completely conditioned. Why do you think those thoughts and not other thoughts? Why do you do these things and not other things? If you look very closely you can see the connections, how one thought leads to another, how inclinations sort of lead to another. In particular the Buddha actually taught to really understand how thinking works and how thinking especially is full of delusion. We're taught these vipassanas, the working of delusion. It's the physics of it, the mechanics of it. Where does thought come from? You start to see, if you look carefully, that thought is built up of your perceptions.

For example, whenever you have your lunch, if you perceive something to be delicious you actually think "that was really nice, I'll have some more of that". Whatever you perceive, if you perceive in a certain way, the thought follows on from that and the thoughts build up the views that "this is delicious" or "Bianca's a good cook" or "you really get good food in this place". Your views are built up by the thoughts which are built up by the perceptions, and where do the perceptions come from? You

perceive according to your views.

I often give a story of when I was a young teenager. I went into a pub in London for my first pint of British beer, vastly underage but that didn't really matter. It was just a dare with your mates and drinking that first sip of beer and being completely taken aback at how dreadful it tasted. The actual experience was that this was really an awful thing because it was just so bitter and it wasn't to my taste at all. But the view, the current view amongst all of my friends and most of society was that this was something delicious. So that first perception came up and by the time I'd finished that beer I'd changed it completely because I wanted it to taste nice and it did taste nice. And I developed a love of British beer and spent a lot of money, a lot of time, drinking it and you can see what happens there. Because of your view that this must be delicious it becomes delicious, and perceptions follow accordingly, and from your perceptions you build up the thoughts, and because of the thoughts you reinforce the views. This is how delusion happens and keeps us in this circle which we find it so hard to get out of.

If we look at our thoughts, we think that they're true because they fit our perceptions and they fit our views. Of course they do because they're made out of this. Your views create your perceptions. Your perceptions build your thoughts. Your thoughts justify your views and here you go on with more perceptions, thoughts and views each supporting each other, justifying one another. You never can see the fallacy of that. Only when you can actually start to stop those thoughts to realise that they're just a part of nature - not trusting them, not thinking they're yours, to be able to let go of them by knowing that this is the doer which you can abandon. The doer is one of the biggest hurdles to overcome, both in meditation and in insight practice, and many of you just know how hard it is to find a way of letting go of this doer.

See if you can practice by suggesting, just for a few moments, non-self, not mine, on this thing, the doer, which is manifesting as your thought. Nothing to do with me. Not mine. Not my business. And you'll find it's much easier to let go when you don't own it. When it's not your responsibility, you don't mind people taking it away. Somebody, if you heard, like a thief breaks into the carpark and steals a car. If you went out there and find "Oh, it's not my car", would you feel the same as if you went out there and found it was your car? You can see how ownership causes a problem. We don't allow things to disappear. We can't let go of them when we think we really own them, that they're mine. So if you do a little bit of anatta practice here, called anatta sanna, just the perception of non-self, then you'll find that it's easy to let go of the thinking, easy to let go of the thoughts. Also, anatta means that there is no-one in here, so you don't do the meditation. How can you do the meditation? Who can do the meditation? This meditation just becomes a natural process. Not you doing it, but meditation happens when you let go of you and allow things to disappear and to get quiet.

When you for a moment, actually practice anatta towards the doer, you allow the meditation to be done by non-self rather than coming from a self, a doer, my meditation, me doing it. The other place where the illusion of self dies is in the knower and again we think that consciousness is us. I am the one who is conscious. I am the one who is experiencing all of this. This consciousness belongs to me which is also why if you really thinks that the consciousness is yours and you own it, you like to keep as much consciousness as you can. In other words, you like to experience as much as you can in this world, which is basically the way of the world. The way of meditation is actually letting go of all that area of consciousness, all those experiences which you can be indulging in, during these nine days. Instead you're just limiting yourself to a very small area of all possible conscious experience, just the breath. Just this moment, no past, no future.

It's interesting what happens when you let go of a lot of the pasture of consciousness and you just limit it to just a small paddock. Usually consciousness can just go anywhere. You'll be conscious of just anything, go experience all of the delights, all of the pleasures in the world. But here you're putting the consciousness in a very small pasture and what happens when you've let go of so much pasture for your consciousness. You say, "Oh, I'm just going to be conscious of the breath. I'm just going to be conscious of the present moment. All these other possibilities I'm going to renounce". You find there is freedom. There is peace. This is some happiness.

Why is that? What's going on? Start to realise that all these other areas don't really belong to you. Nothing to do with you. Give them away and you find the more you can give up of consciousness, the more you can let go of consciousness, let go of the consciousnesses of sight, sound, smells, tastes and touches and things get very peaceful, things get very nice, things get very free. It's because that we think that consciousness is somehow ours, we're unable to let it go. We just still want to be alive. We want to hear. We want to think because deep down that we don't want anyone to take it away from us. We think it's ours. We possess it. We own it and we're not willing to let it go. If you think that consciousness is yours then it's just so hard to let it go. At the very least we can let go of the consciousnesses of the external five senses and just keep a little bit of consciousness of something, but bit by bit when one develops jhana one lets go of more of the pasture where consciousness usually lives, and little by little we let go of consciousness itself. We can only enter into that final jhana of cessation because it's cessation of consciousness. We can even let go of the last vestige of consciousness only when we understand this consciousness isn't us, doesn't belong to us. Only then we can let it go. People are afraid to let go of consciousness when you think it's yours.

So this is actually how we can use this anatta to understand the first jhana or second jhana where there is no doer. You're getting more data, more experience on which to check whether your views, whether your perceptions and thoughts are true or not. And again one of the reasons why the Buddha taught jhanas, one of the reasons why monks like myself keep pushing jhanas, is not just because it makes a nice experience when you bliss out during a retreat and you want to come back next time. It's because that when you enter these jhanas you get these experiences of first of all a doer disappearing. There's something has gone which you thought was yours. There's something has gone which you thought was you. It's not just gone for a moment. It's gone for a long time. It's like basically you're sitting here and your arm disappears. "Wow, where did that go? I thought that was

mine. I thought that belonged to my body. How can you have a body without an arm? There it is. That's really weird". If you see your arm just coming and going, just coming and going, it becomes quite clear. It doesn't belong to you. You see like your leg coming and going. That doesn't belong to you. You see the doer, disappearing for long periods of time. It becomes just as obvious as the nose in front of your face. This thing doesn't belong to you. You can exist without it and actually you exist much happier without it, without a doer.

When I'm talking about a doer, I'm talking about all manifestations of will, choice, decision making, judging. All of that disappears in these states. The simile I usually give for these jhanas is like a tadpole born in the water. The tadpole born in the water, grown up in the water. It only knows water. Actually, it doesn't know very much about water because it's just too close. It's got nothing to compare it with and thinks that's the whole world. It's only when the tadpole grows up and leaves that world, becomes the frog and goes to dry land. It's got that extra data to the world. It's only when you go to dry land that you know what wet means. It's only when you can actually get out of the doer, when the doer disappears, that you know what the doer was, that you know what it truly is. It's just water. It's not the whole world. It's just part of nature. It's not your essential being. So once you enter a jhana or experience the jhanas and come out afterwards, just usually they're so strong an experience, so marvellous, powerful experiences, that most people think when they just get off: "Wow, that was really nice!" But in Buddhism we also teach not to just indulge in the pleasure of having attained these states but also to review them, look back upon them and investigate them: "What was that?"

Powerful experiences are very easy to remember. You can recall them just so well and you look back and see what was strange about that? What was enjoyable about that? And one thing you look back on is to see that the doer has completely gone. What does that actually mean? If you look back upon that enough times you'll come to the insight inevitably. You have to. I don't see how you can miss it. You would see that a great part of you, a great chunk which you thought was you, which you took to be a self, which you assume to be a self, was a great mistake. You just summed it up all wrong. You made an assumption without all the evidence, and now all the evidence is here, you can't keep that assumption again. Just like, you know, people used to think that the world was flat. It is obvious, isn't it, that the world is flat. Just go and look outside. It's flat. You can even put a spirit level on it. There - it's flat. And for most people that's obvious.

"The world is round" takes a jump of perception, especially if somehow you can leave the world and go up in a rocket or a spaceship and you can actually see the world is round. The same with the doer being a self. Right down here, unenlightened human beings. It's just so obvious that the doer is a self. That I am doing these things. That I am choosing. You make that assumption all the time. It's only if we can somehow get apart, away, somehow separated from this, get a perspective on it. See the doer disappear. Only then it'll become very clear, that the doer is nothing to do with a self. The doer has gone. The existence is still there. You're still conscious, still feel like you're there but the doer has gone. Consciousness has remained. Imagine what it's like if you actually could see this and understand this, and accept this. It completely changes your perspective on will-power, on choosing, on doing, on desiring, on craving.

What is craving anyway but another type of doing? If you can actually see this doer is not self, a lot of craving disappears. Also, the other part which one assumes to be a self is just experiencing consciousness. Even though if we attain to just the first jhana we can actually experience for ourselves the doer ceasing. There's still like a conscious experience there. Your mind is still fully awake and there's still knowing. Then, little by little, that knowing disappears. First of all, if you can see the doer as non-self then at least you can have some confidence or you can have some understanding. It's very suggestive. It's a suggestion that it is possible that the knower may not be not you either. If you can develop another jhana, at least you can see a whole heap of knowing disappearing. As the jhanas get more and more refined, a whole chunk of consciousness disappears. Then again you can get an idea, an inkling, that consciousness isn't you. But not only that because in the Dhamma, in Buddhism, the Buddha sort of described consciousness as actually what it actually is, in terms of the six senses. And that each of these senses has got a completely different type of consciousness to it.

Sight consciousness, you know, seeing, is not the same as hearing, is not the same as smelling, tasting, touching or mind consciousness. But why is it we call each of these things consciousness as though it was the same thing? Why is it that we assume that it's like a continuity of knowing? What is it that seems to be the same between seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching? And this is where the experiences of jhanas start to let you understand the illusion of continuity in consciousness

which gives us the illusion that this is always me here rather than the reality of the fragmentary nature of consciousness. The one consciousness arising and passing away and a completely different consciousness arising and then passing away.

Like you're given a simile in a monastery. It's like you are sitting here and now you are a banana. Then, the banana completely vanishes and then you're a mango, and the mango completely vanishes and then you're a melon, and the melon completely vanishes and you're a banana again. And that vanishes and then you're an apple and that vanishes and then you're a mango again. If that was your experience that you know you're a completely different fruit each moment, would you ever think that there was actually something continuing across from one moment to another? Would you actually think there's some sort of identity which was there in the banana, which was there in the apple, which was there in the mango, and so on? That's actually the fragmentary nature of consciousness. Now the reason why people don't see this is because whatever you see with the eyes, the mind also sees. It takes up as an object of its consciousness. You see something, you know you see. Seeing something is sight consciousness. Knowing you see this is mind consciousness. You hear something. You know you hear. Sound consciousness followed immediately by mind consciousness. You smell, taste, you touch something. You know you've touched it. Touch consciousness followed by mind consciousness. Even you imagine something. You know you've imagined it. A thought arises. You know you've thought that thought. You know something. You know you know you know.

What's happening here is even with mind consciousness, whatever arises in the mind, the mind can take that again as its object. Mind consciousness following on mind consciousness. The reality, the truth, if you're going to be more accurate, more precise, is not that you know. It's that you know you know. If you add that time factor there, this whole process of what we call self-consciousness becomes quite clear. It's just the mind taking up the last object of consciousness and repeating it again and it's because mind consciousness is there with what we see, what we hear, what we smell, what we taste, what we touch. It gives the illusion of sameness.

In the simile we have of the different fruit arising, manifesting. It's like there's a fruit. It's like an apple arises with a coconut next to it and then there's a banana. They both disappear and then there's a banana arises with a coconut next to it. Then there's an apple arises with a coconut next to it, and there's a mango with a coconut next to it. Then there's a banana with a coconut next to it and there's a coconut with a coconut next to it and there's a banana again with a coconut next to it. The coconut stands for mind consciousness. Always holding onto the other consciousness. Always being there with it giving the illusion of sameness. What happens if you get into jhanas is that there all you've got is coconuts. All that you've got is mind consciousness. All the other five consciousnesses have completely disappeared. Only if you have the jhanas you really understand what the mind is, what mind consciousness is, what a coconut is, because you've separated it out. You've distilled it. You've purified it. You know what this thing, mind, consciousness, experience actually is, rather than just thinking about it or philosophising about it.

Once you recognise this sixth consciousness - call it citta, call it vinnana, mano, ... whatever you wish - once you understand what that actually is - mind or mind consciousness - then when you come out of jhanas you can see it. Instead of just having the apple-coconut or mango-coconut, thinking it's just one fruit with sort of the sameness to it, you can actually split off mind consciousness. You can actually see, there is seeing, mind consciousness comes up right next. You can actually recognise it. You've seen it in its purity, alone, and you can actually see sound consciousness and then mind consciousness come up right afterwards. What you actually see if you can recognise what mind, citta or consciousness truly is, is that you can actually take apart this sensory experience. You can actually see the fragmentary nature of it. Banana then coconut. Apple then coconut. There's nothing which is there all the time. Consciousness changes. Six types, each completely different. "Which one is you?", the Buddha asked.

If you are consciousness, if the conscious experience is the identity which you say is your self and soul, if it's that which sees, which one is it which is you? If it is any one of them, then where do you go when that consciousness which is you disappears and one of the other five is there? It just does not make sense. It cannot hold. You can never look again at consciousness once you see it fragmentary, as being a self, being a soul, being a me, being mine.

It's only if consciousness is continuous, has got this continuity about it, that you can think it's a self or a soul. It's something which belongs to you. Also, when you can see it's fragmentary then it passes away, you can allow it to go. You can let it stop. When you see especially these two what I call "abodes of delusion of self", the doer and consciousness, or will and consciousness, you can see that each one of these can never be regarded as a self, a me or a mine. Nothing to do with this and there's no other place where a self can hang out. Then you can see that consciousness is just a process, a natural process. It's

nothing to do with a person or a being. It's something which arises and passes away according to causes. Same as will, it's something which arises and passes away because of causes.

When it doesn't belong to you then you can let it go. You can let it cease. You can let it end. Only then can Nibbana be possible. Nibbana is the ceasing of all of this. It was very clearly described what Nibbana was by the Buddha. When a flame goes out, it's Nibbana. Where's it go out to? Does it go and become unified with the great flame being? Does it go to some great home where all flames go to but you can't see them but they're really there?

The Buddha actually said, "does the flame go East?" No. "Does it go West?" No. "Does it go up?" No. "Does it go down?" No. "Does it go anywhere?" No. It's just gone out. That's what Nibbana means. What was once there is now finished, gone. The process has ended. You can only allow that to happen. It only makes sense. It can only be a possibility for you if you realise that none of this has an essence to it and none of this has a self to it. None of this belongs to you or belongs to anyone. It's just a part of nature.

Of course people say "What's the point of this if it's just going to end and you're going to go 'poof' and you're gone? I don't want to go". Why don't you want to go? Because you think you're still there. What are you hanging on to that you don't want to leave? Nibbana? What have you got a vested interest in? What do you think you own? Who is the owner which you're not willing to recognise as emptiness?

If you can actually understand this and fully recognise and penetrate non-self, then you understand what Nibbana means and only then, you understand what the Buddha was talking about - about the process, a natural process, which leads to the cessation of all of this and basically people say "well, that might sound OK but I'm not having anything to do with this! Maybe I don't want Nibbana. I just want to have a good time". Unfortunately you've got no say in it.

That's what I've told quite a few people on the retreat. They said "well, I've got maybe a few doubts. I'm not really sure whether I want to really sort of carry this meditation all the way to the jhanas and, you know, become a monk or become a nun, and sort of let go of everything and get into Nibbana". They're not quite sure of this. I said to them "don't worry about it because you've got no choice!"

It's very much like you're on a bus and once you're on that bus you can shout the driver to "let me off at this stop". But

unfortunately it's an express bus with only one stop at the end of the journey. It's not going to stop half way. There are no little buttons to press to get the driver to stop. You're on this until the very end. It has to eventually end up with letting everything go. It's abandoning things, giving up things. First of all, you give up what's outside. Then you start giving up what's inside. Inside, outside, it's the same. You give up everything until there's nothing left.

It's so beautiful. That's what we call emptiness, going out, disappearing, because you realise there's nothing there, only an illusion. The illusion has been seen and everything grinds to a halt, just like that machine which I was talking about yesterday. It's turned on. Who had turned it on, I don't know, but this whole purpose is to get that hand coming up the front which is called, you know, the meditation, and turning itself off and then it's done its function, its business.

So anyway, that's a little talk on anatta for this evening. A different way than I've taught before, with some little pointers about the practice of anatta in your meditation. So give that a go. See what happens when you've completely let go. Only letting go from the imagination of there's no-one in here.

-ooOoo-

Source: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Jhanas>

<http://www.saigon.com/~anson/ebud/ebmed055.htm>